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SUBJECT: BULGARIA STRUGGLES TO DISCLOSE COMMUNIST-ERA FILES

Ref: (A) Sofia 1499, (B) Sofia 786

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Bulgaria's parliament passed groundbreaking legislation on December 6, to open up the files of the former communist secret services. Under the law, adopted after heated debate, all senior officials in the Presidency, Parliament, government, the Judiciary, academia, mass media, etc., will be checked for links with the former State Security service. The Socialist-led majority decided, however, that second-tier chiefs in the present-day intelligence services will not be checked for affiliation to the State Security due to national security reasons. The controversial provision was adopted after intense discussion among the partners in the ruling center-left coalition and under what MPs termed as "immense pressure" from the current intelligence leadership and influential Socialist circles. The new legislation was also marked by the mysterious death of the official in charge of the ex-communist intelligence files. The timing and delayed public announcement of his apparent suicide triggered a wave of speculation and highlighted the need for Bulgaria to come to terms with its communist-era past. END SUMMARY

THE UNTOUCHABLES: INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS

12. (SBU) Unlike other East European countries, Bulgaria has never fully released the files of its former State Security Committee (the communist security agency that included intelligence and counter-intelligence services and political police.) Socialist PM Sergei Stanishev has shown political will to resolve the sensitive and divisive issue, even though his party is expected to suffer most from the file's disclosure. While there has been broad consensus among the political class that the files of the notorious communist political police should be opened in full, influential BSP politicians have argued that some of the communist intelligence files should be kept classified "for national security reasons." Thus, in what has become the biggest controversy surrounding the new law, the BSP-led majority decided that heads of departments, offices and sections within the present-day military or civil intelligence services will not be checked for affiliation with the former State Security. The widely debated amendment to the initial draft was adopted after tense consultations between the BSP and its coalition partners, the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) and the National Movement for Simeon II, both of which have demanded the complete release of the files.

POLITICAL PRESSURE

13. (SBU) MPs from the ruling coalition, who drafted the law, backed off after an emergency meeting with the National Intelligence Service (NIS) chief, Gen. Kircho Kirov, who reportedly argued the amendment was needed to protect people who are still on active intelligence duty. MPs who drafted the law openly spoke about being subjected to "immense pressure" from the current intelligence leadership and influential Socialist circles to adopt the controversial text. MRF deputy leader Kassim Dal, an author of the initial draft law, said in an interview that Kirov's strong opposition to files' complete disclosure illuminated the fact that his service had not been sufficiently reformed. A vocal opponent of

the archives opening, Kirov has said that "the archives should not be opened immediately and read like a newspaper." He was backed by the communist-era intelligence officers, now grouped in the Association of the Reserve Intelligence Officers, who told a news conference the declassification of the files would be a "suicidal act" for the present-day intelligence services.

¶4. (SBU) The issue has drawn a dividing line within the Socialist Party as well, with reformist BSP MP Tatyana Doncheva telling local media about pressure coming from "the very top" of the state. A leader of the lobby in favor of complete disclosure, Doncheva stopped short of directly pointing the finger at President Georgi Parvanov, although clearly implied his involvement. The center-right opposition party led by ex-PM Ivan Kostov, however, openly accused Parvanov and the NIS which is under him, of inspiring the controversial text, and again reminded the public about the Socialist President's alleged ties with communist-era State Security. Parvanov, the former BSP leader who won re-election by a landslide in October, earlier this year openly voiced his opposition to the files' declassification, saying that the issue "might push Bulgaria back." Allegations that Parvanov collaborated with the State Security intelligence service led him to acknowledge in June the existence of a secret intelligence file on him, code-named "Gotse" (Ref. A). This dossier should be kept in the NIS which presently houses the files of the communist intelligence service (the State Security First Directorate). Interior Minister Roumen Petkov, a close associate of Parvanov, has also firmly opposed the files' opening and was allegedly among the Socialist politicians who exercised pressure on BSP MPs to adopt the controversial text.

PUBLIC FIGURES UNDER SCRUTINY

¶5. (U) The new law opens the files of the communist State Security Committee and the Bulgarian military intelligence services prior to July 16, 1991, when those services were formally disbanded. The law

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stipulates the disclosure of the names of public figures who have worked or collaborated with the communist secret services. Falling into this category are:

- President, Vice president; Prime Minister, government ministers, senior officials in the Presidency, government, Judiciary, central bank, government agencies, regulatory bodies;
- Senior officials in the Ministries of Interior, Defense and the intelligence services;
- Regional governors and deputies, mayors, deputy mayors and municipal counselors;
- Senior officials in the state and private media, academia, polling agencies, professional trade unions, public health organizations;
- Senior officials in financial institutions (banks, insurance and re-insurance companies, brokerage houses, investment intermediaries and investment funds,) gaming companies and telecom operators;
- Senior officials in the political parties, religious communities, chambers of commerce and sports organizations;
- Senior Bulgarian officials in the EU, NATO bodies and every other international organization of which Bulgaria is a member;
- Any officials holding positions through a presidential appointment (such as Ambassadors) and through an appointment by parliament, government or the PM.

INDEPENDENT BODY TO UNVEIL FILES

¶6. (U) The communist-era files will be reviewed by an independent commission, whose nine members will be elected by parliament for a five-year term. No political party or coalition will have a majority. The commission will collect, study, analyze and evaluate the information in the State Security files and the Bulgarian military intelligence files; disclose and announce the names of the public officials whom the committee has established have links to the services; and publish this info on the commission's Internet site. The archives of the State Security and the communist military intelligence should be handed over to the commission within eight months. The law allows every Bulgarian citizen to have access to information collected by the former State Security and the military intelligence services about them and their deceased relatives.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH PROMPTS SPECULATION

17. (SBU) The need to resolve the issue with the communist files was further highlighted by the death of the official responsible for the intelligence archives, who was found in his office with a bullet in his head just two weeks before parliament started debating the new law. Bozhidar Doychev, 61, had served since 1991 as director of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) archives. The public announcement of Doychev's death, however, was delayed for 24 hours and was made only after a London-based Internet news provider broke the story. Only then did Chief Prosecutor Boris Velchev and Interior Minister Roumen Petkov confirm his death, saying that Doychev had most probably committed suicide for personal reasons and dismissing any link to his job. The timing of his death and its delayed announcement, however, triggered a wave of speculation. Center-right opposition MPs and commentators openly contest the official version, speculating that Doychev might have been subject to pressure to destroy some documents for people who want their links with the former security services to remain hidden. Local press noted that of the present NIS staff, only Doychev and service chief Kirov had unlimited access to the full archive. Doychev's relatives added fuel to the fire, telling local media they were dismayed by the official explanation, without benefit of an investigation, or even questioning the relatives.

18. (U) Kirov said the reason his service had not announced Doychev's death was that NIS was not a public agency and did not have a press office. Gen. Dimo Gyaurov, who headed the NIS in 1997-2002, questioned the official explanation, saying that "no one so far has given a single serious argument in support of this version." "I would not rule out, him being subjected to a certain pressure which could have become the reason (for the suicide)," Gyaurov, who recently returned from an assignment as Ambassador to Hungary, told a TV interview. Local media recalled that Doychev's death was not the first one of a key intelligence official that could be related to the communist intelligence files. In 1991, Gen. Stoyan Savov, deputy head of the State Security's First Directorate, committed suicide just a day before he had to appear in court as a defendant on a case of alleged destruction of State Security files.

SECRETS AND LIES UNVEILED?

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19. (SBU) Although belatedly adopted, the public expectation is that the law will help expose links of current politicians and public figures to State Security, thus diminishing their influence on various areas of Bulgaria's public life. The opening of the files may also shed more light on the State Security service operations, with the work of the notorious Sixth Directorate, the political police that was used as an instrument of oppression by the communist leadership, expected to evoke strong public attention and painful revelations. The files may also unveil more information about the foreign operations of the intelligence services, including the

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notorious 1978 "umbrella" murder in London of dissident writer Georgi Markov. Public interest will also focus on files with information about the overseas trading companies and offshore shell companies launched by the State Security in 1983-1989. Those firms later provided the resources for most of the private commercial banks and businesses that sprung up after communism collapsed, forming the country's business elite. The files may give information about communist-era "hidden transit," a term used by the secret services for the state-organized and controlled channels for

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smuggling arms, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, precious metals, and antiquities from and through Bulgaria. Those channels, organized by former counter-intelligence, have served as a basis for post-communist organized crime groups and their disclosure may illuminate links of current organized crime figures to the State Security.

DOUBTS STILL REMAIN...

¶10. (SBU) Many Bulgarians, however, remain skeptical, saying the files are unlikely to yield critical revelations, because the past 17 post-communist years have provided ample opportunity for the communist archives to be destroyed or tampered with. Back in 1991, a court case established that a significant portion of the State Security files was burned in January-February 1990 in the furnaces of a metallurgical plant in the small town of Pernik. According to some reports, as much as 46 percent of the files of all collaborators, 30 percent of the files of people placed under surveillance, and 91 percent of the archive on those who let facilities to the secret police had been destroyed in this period. This, coupled with speculation that some of the archives had been exported to Moscow right after communism collapsed, support the view among Bulgarians that the whole truth about the State Securities deeds and network may never be unveiled. Politicians and commentators said that much will depend on the new commission's composition and the will of the Interior Minister and secret services' chiefs to implement the law and hand over the complete archives on time.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) The adoption of the new law may not reveal the whole story of the communist State Security, but it still constitutes Bulgaria's most far-reaching move to date to deal with the sensitive issue of the communist-era files. Insiders have told us the passage of the landmark law was just the first battle - they expect stiff opposition to the actual implementation of the law from the same circles that fought to limit its scope, and a major battle over the nomination of the Commission's chairman, who will have access to the most sensitive files that are not subject to disclosure. Although slow and difficult at present, we expect that this process will ultimately have a positive impact on Bulgarian society in the long-term. It will also lend credibility to a new generation of post-communist politicians, such as PM Stanishev, who has been supportive to the process despite strong internal party opposition.

END COMMENT

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